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SENSITIVE
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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [CASC](#) [GB](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: STUDENTS PROTEST, TEACHERS' STRIKE RESUMES

¶1. (U) Hundreds of secondary school students organized impromptu protests throughout the city of Libreville December 15 upon learning that their teachers had walked out on strike. The protests disrupted traffic on major Libreville thoroughfares. There were reports of some students throwing stones at vehicles, but no confirmed reports of injuries or property damage. Police responded to the demonstrations and by noon the protests had disbanded. The teachers' labor dispute, however, remains unresolved and students face the risk of having to repeat this year's studies. There is also concern that labor actions will spread to other government sectors, with employees of one ministry announcing their own "unlimited" strike action.

¶2. (U) Protests erupted when students arrived at Libreville schools and found no teachers present. Three weeks ago, members of the teacher's union Convention Nationale des Syndicates du Secteur de l'Education (CONASYSED) suspended an earlier strike following government promises to address their issues. The teachers demanded both an increase in pay and--more critically--a consistent pay and benefit scale for all teachers regardless of when or where they were hired. On Saturday, December 13 CONASYSED held a mass meeting of its members and voted to resume the strike. CONASYSED claimed the government has misrepresented the degree of progress achieved so far in negotiations. Despite the CONASYSED vote, police were unprepared for the student protests when school failed to open on Monday.

¶3. (SBU) The Gabonese government is taking a hard line with the teachers, according to many sources, because it fears that other public service employees will make similar demands. A visiting IMF team confirmed to Embassies December 15 that these are real fears: with a declining price of oil, the Gabonese government has far less flexibility to respond to demands for pay increases, particularly if it is to maintain the fiscal and monetary discipline expected by the IMF and international creditors.

¶4. (U) In response to today's events, we advised U.S. mission staff by text and email messages to stand fast and/or take alternate routes to avoid the protests. A warden message was not deemed necessary because, with the exception of reported stone-throwing early in the morning, consistent reports from the protest sites indicated that the students were peaceful and the police well-behaved. We will continue to monitor the situation.

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